



Jericho, NY (Long Island)— On Friday, U.S. Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY) announced new legislation that will close a food labeling loophole that allows food manufacturers to avert listing the accurate trans fat content in products. The legislation was announced during a health class at Jericho Middle School, where an American Heart Association expert on trans fat discussed its negative health impacts and Rep. Israel demonstrated how food labeled with 0 grams trans fat may actually contain significant amounts of partially hydrogenated oil, the source of trans fat.

"Many individuals eat more trans fats than is safe each day, all while thinking they've made wise nutritional decisions," said Congressman Israel. "Trans fat is a deadly killer and the federal government should not be a willing accomplice. Sadly, labeling requirements allow food manufactures to list a product as having '0 grams' trans fat so long as the trans fat content in one serving is less than 0.5 grams. When the American Heart Association recommends that individuals limit their trans fat content to less than 2 grams per day, we cannot afford to be so lenient in labeling requirements. Only in Washington does $0.4 + 0.4 = 0$. Now, I'm not proposing a ban on trans fat. But we should give consumers the necessary information to make informed nutrition choices. That's what my legislation, the 'Trans Fat Truth in Labeling Act,' would do."

"There really is no room in the food supply for the artificial trans fat that comes from partially hydrogenated oil. If a food contains any partially hydrogenated oil, the asterisk that this legislation proposes would signal to consumers that there is up to a half a gram," said Michael F. Jacobson, Executive Director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "But, more importantly, I hope that Representative Israel's bill paves the way for even broader federal action to get that one particular artificial ingredient out of packaged food and restaurant food altogether. Representative Israel's legislation doesn't just safeguard the public health. It helps safeguard the English language, whose words tend to gradually lose their meaning at the hands of myopic federal regulators. Let's let zero mean zero again."

"Many individuals are unaware that it is relatively easy to accumulate more than the recommended limit of less than 2 grams of trans fat per day since one food package may contain more than a single serving," according to American Heart Association spokesperson Judith Wylie-Rosett. "This improved labeling regulation will help consumers make wise food choices based on a more accurate product label and save thousands of lives."

Although the American Heart Association recommends that individuals limit their daily trans fat

intake to less than 2 grams per day, food companies may label products containing partially hydrogenated oils as having 0 grams of trans fat so long as the value per serving is under 0.5 grams. As a result, a consumer may exceed his/her recommended daily maximum value of trans fat without even realizing it—by eating multiple portions of a product containing 0.4 grams trans fat per serving but labeled as 0 grams. On Friday, Israel will announce new legislation that will enhance the clarity of trans fat information on food nutritional labeling.

Recognizing the inherent health risks posed by trans fat, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began requiring food manufacturers to list trans fat on U.S. food labels as of January 1, 2006. However, food companies may label products containing partially hydrogenated oils as having 0 grams of trans fat so long as the value per serving is under 0.5 grams. That means an individual eating multiple portions of a food with 0.4 grams per serving but labeled as 0 grams could easily exceed the American Heart Association-recommended limit of 2 grams of total trans fat per day without recognizing it.

Trans fat (trans fatty acid) is considered the most dangerous of the four types of fat. It occurs when oil is processed through partial hydrogenation (an industrial process used to make oil more solid, modify the texture of foods or add to their shelf-lives). Trans fat is found in many baked products like cookies, crackers and cakes and in cooking oils, margarine and shortening.

Since it lowers HDL (good cholesterol), increases LDL (bad cholesterol) and contributes to the hardening and clogging of the arteries, trans fat is a leading contributor to heart disease. According to a joint study by the Harvard School of Public Health and the Brigham and Women's Hospital, "By our most conservative estimate, replacement of partially hydrogenated fat in the U.S. diet with natural unhydrogenated vegetable oils would prevent approximately 30,000 premature coronary deaths per year, and epidemiologic evidence suggests this number is closer to 100,000 premature deaths annually."

Congressman Israel's legislation amends existing FDA regulations to require manufacturers to indicate that a product has less than 0.5 grams trans fat by using an asterisk in the "amount per serving" column. At the bottom of the label, the manufacturer would indicate that the asterisk means that the product "contains less than 0.5 grams trans fat."